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E.O. 12958; NA

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SUBJECT: OFDA-FUNDED FOOD SECURITY ACTIVITIES IN THE
RUZIZI PLAIN AND MIDDLE PLATEAU

- ¶1. (U) During a recent visit to the Uvira area, OFDA Rep Victor Bushamuka viewed USAID/OFDA-funded food security activities implemented by Action Against Hunger (AAH-USA) in various parts of the Ruzizi plain. As part of a larger project, AAH restored irrigation canals in the Ruzizi plain and rehabilitated fish ponds in the middle plateau of Uvira. Although the OFDA project has significantly contributed to the improvement of food security of IDPs and returnees of Uvira and Fizi, food security programs will continue to be needed for at least another year. END SUMMARY.
- ¶2. (U) During a recent visit to the Uvira area, OFDA Rep Victor Bushamuka had the opportunity to evaluate the efforts by Action Against Hunger (AAH-USA) to improve food security in various sections of the Ruzizi plain -- a large, low flat stretch of land extending northward from the upper border of Lake Tanganyika along the Ruzizi River. The area has been highly volatile in terms of security since 1996, with repeated clashes between armed groups often result in massive movements of the population within and outside the area and sometimes into Burundi (as was most recently the case when the insurgency of Col. Jules Mutebusi temporarily held the town of Kamanyola for a few days in June, causing over 20,000 Congolese to flee across the border).
- ¶3. (U) AAH-USA's agricultural activities in the Ruzizi Plain are part of a larger project funded by USAID/OFDA to improve food security and to facilitate the re-establishment of livelihood-sustaining activities for IDPs, returnees, and other vulnerable populations in both Uvira and Fizi territories. During the 2003-2004 main agricultural season, AAH-USA distributed 64 metric tones of food crop seeds including maize, bean, and peanut, and 570 kg of vegetable seeds to 15,400 households, representing about 77,000 people. Agricultural tools distributed included 16,400 hoes and 11,400 watering cans. Approximately 500 beneficiaries in 25 fishing villages along the west shore of Lake Tanganyika also benefited from a distribution of boats and fishing nets. AAH-USA estimates that it has already directly assisted over 85,000 returnees, IDPs and other vulnerable populations in the two territories.
- ¶4. (U) In addition to distributing basic agricultural inputs, AAH has also helped to rehabilitate dams and irrigation canals in 6 villages in the Ruzizi Plain and 3 villages along the west shore of Lake Tanganyika as part of its efforts to promote the re-establishment of income generating activities. An association of rice producers also received a rice grinder as part of the project, and both on the plain and in the "Middle Plateau" area just above it to the west, AAH has helped rehabilitate 258 fish ponds for fish farmers.
- ¶5. (U) Frequent clashes between various military and various armed groups, including Mai-Mai and Interahamwe, have prevented AAH from covering all the areas as it had originally intended. Ndolera and Lubarika could not be reached in 2003, becoming accessible only in February 2004. Clashes between Interahamwe and military on the Middle Plateau near Lemera led to a temporary suspension of AAH activities in that area in March.
- ¶6. (U) In the 2004/2005 season, AAH plans to extend its distribution activities to newly accessible areas, including the Ndolera and Lubarika of the Middle

Plateau and villages on the Ubwari peninsula south of Uvira. Additional maize/cassava mills are planned in 2004-2005 for Baraka, Fizi center, Lemera and Ndolera, and a rice grinder in Nundu. The irrigation rehabilitation program will be extended to such Middle-Plateau villages as Kigombo, Rubanga and Kiringye.

17. (U) To reduce the continuing relatively high rate of malnutrition in the area, AAH intends to work through local NGOs to promote the production and consumption of soybean throughout Uvira and Fizi Territories. In this initiative, seeds will be produced by selected local NGOs after they have received training in seed multiplication, soybean production and transformation procedures. Seeds produced by these NGOs will be either distributed to new returnees and IDPs or sold at a reduced price to interested residents in the 2004-2005 planting season. AAH has had success with soybean promotion in other areas of the project. OFDA Rep saw a number of flourishing soybean fields in villages along the axis Makobola-Baraka, south of Uvira.

Observations

18. (U) Although the OFDA project has significantly contributed to the improvement of food security of IDPs and returnees in the territories of Uvira and Fizi, food security programs will continue to be needed for at least another year since the area is one of the last in eastern DRC to benefit from the peace brought to much of the country by the installation of the transitional government in June of 2003 and since much of the area's population has yet to return. MEECE.